

Excelsior Hotel  
Northwest side of Austin Street,  
between Market and Vale Streets  
Jefferson  
Marion County  
Texas

HABS No. TEX-112

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TEX  
155-JEF  
5-

PHOTOGRAPHS  
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey  
Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation  
National Park Service  
Department of the Interior  
Washington, D.C. 20240

Excelsior Hotel  
Jefferson, Marion County, Texas

Owner Miss Ma. A. Niedermier, Jefferson, Texas

Date of Erection 1850-60

Architect Unknown

Builder Unknown

Number of Stories Two

Present Condition Good

Materials of Construction Frame and brick

Other Existing Records None

Additional Data The frame portion of the building was built in 1850 by Captain William Perry of New Hampshire. It was used as an hotel and was known as "The Irvine House". The corner portion of the hotel which is of brick was built during the 1860's but it has nothing of the charm that is found in the frame portion. Again New Orleans influence is found here not only in the iron work of the street front but also in the semi-patio in the rear. The present owner has an interesting scrap book that contains clippings that tell of the past glories of the hotel and of Jefferson, and the old registers bear the signatures of Jay Gould, John Jacob Astor, H. K. Vanderbilt, General U. S. Grant and scores of actors and actresses of a by-gone period.

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HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

HABS No. TEX-112

EXCELSIOR HOTEL

An addendum to  
Excelsior Hotel  
Jefferson, Texas  
in HABS Catalog (1941) ,

Location: Northwest side of Austin Street, between Market  
and Vale Streets, Jefferson, Marion County, Texas

Present Owner: Jessie Allen Wise Garden Club

Present Use: Hotel

Statement of  
Significance: This hotel, while changing ownership many times,  
has remained in continuous operation since the  
1850's. The original frame portion is similar to  
many roadside inns built in the mid-19th century  
in other sections of the country.

PART 1. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: The northeast wing is believed to have been constructed shortly after William Perry acquired the property, probably c. 1858-59. The southwest wing was probably added sometime between the end of the Civil War and 1872 (it appears in a bird's eye drawing of Jefferson by H. Brosius dated 1872).
2. Original and subsequent owners: Captain William Perry, owner of dredge boats which kept the Big Cypress Bayou open for steamboat traffic, acquired the property in 1858 (Marion County Deed Book A, p. 781). In 1867, it was sold to William Tumlin (Marion County Deed Book C, p. 745). In 1869, after the death of Tumlin, A. A. Terhune became the owner (Marion County Deed Book E, p. 67). At this time it was known as the "Commercial Hotel." During the next decade ownership changed hands frequently, until Mrs. Kate Wood purchased the property in 1878 (Marion County Deed Book M, p. 474). After her death in 1907, the hotel was inherited by her daughter, Mrs. Amelia McNeely (Marion County Deed Book J, p. 591). In 1920, the property was bequeathed to George S. Neidermeir (Marion County Deed Book M, p. 228). Hotel ownership remained in this family until 1954 when it was purchased by Mrs. James H. Peters. The Jessie Allen Wise Garden Club purchased the hotel in 1961 and restored it.

3. Architect: Unknown.
4. Alterations and additions: The porch and colonnade next to the street, which tie the two wings together visually, are undated. They appear to have been added after the two hotel wings were constructed. The two solariums, garden landscaping, front planter, and new entry-door to the northeast wing were added during Mrs. James H. Peters' ownership. She also remodeled several of the guest rooms in the southwest wing. The kitchen on the northwest was added in 1964.

B. Historical Events and Persons Connected with the Structure:

Among the famous guests of the hotel were Ulysses S. Grant, Rutherford B. Hayes and John Jacob Aster. Oscar Wilde was also a guest there when he was in Jefferson to recite poetry at the opera house.

C. Sources of Information:

Bracken, Dorothy Kendall, and Redway, Maurine Whorton. Early Texas Homes. Dallas: Southern Methodist University Press, 1956.

Brochure on the history of the Excelsior House published by The Jessie Allen Wise Garden Club.

Cameron, Rebecca M. and Lester, Ruth G., Jefferson on the Bayou. Marshall, Texas: The Demmer Company, Inc., 1966.

Marion County Deed Books.

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: The northeast wing of the Excelsior Hotel, which was constructed c. 1858, is stylistically in the Classical Revival Mode. It was similar to many mid-century roadside inns built in other sections of the country. In contrast, the southwest wing, which was added c. 1872, is more "commercial" in character.
2. Condition of fabric: Good. It has been fully restored.

B. Description of Northeast Wing (Original Building):

1. Exterior:

- a. Over-all dimensions: 34'-2" by 71'-0".

- b. Foundations: Due to sidewalks and adjacent buildings, the foundation construction cannot be seen.
  - c. Wall construction: Wood frame. The finished-wall thickness is 7" for exterior walls. Walls are clapboarded with 5-1/2" to the weather.
  - d. Porches and balconies: On the northwest (rear) side there is a roofed balcony with wooden rail which runs the full length of the building. The porch across the front is discussed under the c. 1872 wing.
  - e. Chimneys: There are two brick chimneys. They are not used.
  - f. Openings:
    - 1) Doorways and doors: The front door to the original hotel was replaced in 1954. In the process, the opening was moved southwest approximately ten feet. The doors opening to the garden appear to be original. They are double with four panels below and two panels above a large panel of glass.
    - 2) Windows: The original windows were wooden, double-hung six-over-six light sash. A solarium was created in 1954 by installing glass between the columns under the north corner of the balcony. This glass is all fixed and consists of twelve and twenty-four light sashes.
  - g. Roof:
    - 1) Shape, covering: The roof is hipped with a standing-seam, sheet-metal covering.
    - 2) Cornice and eaves: The roof overhangs 12". Construction of the cornice is simple, consisting of a plain frieze, fascia and beveled crown-molding.
2. Interior:
- a. Floor plans: The first floor has a central cross-corridor with guest rooms on either side. On the second floor, there are four large guest rooms off a single-loaded corridor.
  - b. Stairways: There is one stairway to the second floor. It consists of a single run. Walls completely enclose it. The handrails have been recently replaced.

Access to the stairway is near the front door, just off the lobby.

- c. Flooring: The floors are now carpeted throughout. Originally they were exposed pine, tongue-and-groove boards about 5" wide. Solarium has rubber tile floor.
- d. Wall and ceiling finish: Walls and ceilings are finished with plaster and covered with wallpaper. Every room has a wooden wainscot. This varies in height and design. In the first floor corridor, it is 30" high and consists of narrow, tongue-and-groove boards, applied vertically and capped by a heavy molding. In the guest rooms and second-floor corridor, the wainscot is 24" high and consists of wooden panels.
- e. Doors: Interior doors are 3'-0" by 7'-0". They have four unmolded panels.
- f. Trim: Doors and windows have 2- $\frac{1}{4}$ " by 6" casings. The baseboard is 10" high, plain, with a quarter-round shoe mold. The baseboard does not appear to be original.
- g. Hardware: Iron rim-locks and porcelain knobs. This hardware appears original.
- h. Lighting: Modern electric fixtures.
- i. Heating: Small, gas-fired, unit heaters.

C. Description of Southwest Wing (c. 1872 Addition):

1. Exterior:

- a. Over-all dimensions: 29'-11" by 100'-5 $\frac{1}{2}$ ".
- b. Foundations: Brick.
- c. Wall construction: Brick, 18" thick.
- d. Porches and balconies: A roofed balcony 8'-4" wide runs along the northeast side and joins the similar balcony of the northeast wing at the ell. There is an exterior straight run stairway from ground level to balcony.

There is a porch 16' wide which extends across the front of both buildings and covers the sidewalk. It

is supported by cast-iron columns. The flat deck is reached from a second-story door in the southwest wing and is surrounded by an ornamental cast-iron railing. The porch does not appear to have been constructed at the same time as either wing and is undated.

e. Chimneys: There are 19 chimneys, one for each guest room fireplace. These are not used now.

f. Openings:

- 1) Doorways and doors: Two-panel French doors in rectangular openings. There are four openings across the end of the building.
- 2) Windows and window openings: Windows are three-over-three light wooden, double-hung sash in segmental-arched openings. On the northeast corner a solarium was created by installing twelve and twenty-four light windows between the balcony columns.

g. Roof:

- 1) Shape, covering: The hipped roof is covered with asbestos shingles.
- 2) Cornice and eaves: The roof terminates against a parapet which is 3'-7" high.

2. Interior:

- a. Floor plans: The ground floor contains a lobby, museum, ballroom and dining room. The second floor has a central corridor on either side of which are the guest rooms. There were apparently 19 guest rooms, approximately 9'-9" by 10'-6 1/2". Many partitions have been removed to make larger rooms.
- b. Stairways: One interior stairway from the lobby. It has two runs at right angles with one landing, turned balusters and square newels.
- c. Flooring: The original flooring was 5"-wide pine boards. In many places this has been covered with new oak flooring, carpet or tile. The solarium has a brick floor. The kitchen has a vinyl floor.

- d. Doors: The interior doors are four-panel, 2'-9" by 7'-0" on the second floor. These doors have three-light transoms. Doors on the first floor between museum and ballroom are double with large lights.
- e. Wall and ceiling finish: On the first floor, the walls are plastered except in the ballroom where the walls are finished with stamped-metal paneling. There is a wooden wainscot in all the first-floor rooms. This varies in height between 3'-0" and 3'-11".

The lobby and museum have narrow, wood, tongue-and-groove ceilings. In the ballroom there is a stamped-metal ceiling and in the dining room, the ceiling is plastered.

The original walls on the second floor are composed of 1" by 13" boards, installed vertically with 1" by 3" battens on both sides. In many places these walls have been covered with gypsum board. The original ceiling material was wide boards. It has also been covered in many places with gypsum board.

- f. Trim: A 9" base has been used on the first floor. Door and window casings are 6" wide, plain. On the second floor the original walls had a 4" base. Door and window casing was 1 $\frac{1}{4}$ " by 3".
- g. Hardware: Original hardware is iron. Locks were the rim type with porcelain knobs.
- h. Lighting: Modern electric fixtures. Several chandeliers - one of metal and one of china - are believed to be original.
- i. Heating: Unit gas-heaters. Originally each room in the c. 1872 addition had a small fireplace. The hearth was 1'-9" wide by 2'-0" high.

D. Site and Surroundings:

The courtyard, or garden, created by the ell arrangement of buildings was landscaped in 1954. This included brick paving and a fountain.

Prepared by Willard B. Robinson, AIA  
Supervisory Architect, HABS  
National Park Service  
July 1966



PART III. PROJECT INFORMATION

These records were made in 1966 during a summer project financed by the National Park Service to record 16 structures in Jefferson and the near-by area. The summer recording team received the cooperation of numerous citizens and organizations who provided office space, lodgings, board, and research assistance. Among the cooperators were the Dan Lester Drilling Company, the Excelsior Hotel, Mrs. A. K. Payne, the Jessie Allen Wise Garden Club, and the Marion County Chamber of Commerce.

The project was under the direction of A. Lewis Koue of the Historic American Buildings Survey's Western Office in San Francisco. Supervisor of the recording team was Willard B. Robinson, AIA, of Texas Technological College. The team was composed of student architects David L. Bouse of the University of Nebraska, Bob J. Fong of the University of Idaho, Donald Quackenbush of Washington State University, and Robert M. Swanson of the University of Texas. Photographs were made by National Park Service Photographer, Jack E. Boucher.